

An Introduction to the Shibusawa Shashi Database (SSD)

<http://shashi.shibusawa.or.jp/>

Izumi Koide

Resource Center for the History of Entrepreneurship
Shibusawa Eiichi Memorial Foundation

What is the SSD?

A plan for the shashi index database project of the Shibusawa Eiichi Memorial Foundation was described in the research notes section of the inaugural issue of this journal. The database was formally named the “Shibusawa Shashi Database” (SSD for short) and, after ten long years of effort, was made available online in April 2014 at <http://shashi.shibusawa.or.jp/index.php>. The aim of the database is to enhance access to the contents of shashi, a group of resources that remain under-used despite the extremely rich information contained therein.

According to Katsuko Murahashi, the number of Japanese shashi hitherto published is estimated to be 14,000 titles. Since the entirety of the genre is prohibitively large to be dealt with by a small cultural institution such as ourselves, we decided to focus on the some 1,500 shashi of companies related to Shibusawa Eiichi. Shibusawa Eiichi was one of the earliest modern bankers who founded and/or helped to establish and manage some 500 companies. Thus, although the number of shashi included in the database is limited, the wide scope of Shibusawa Eiichi’s activities means that the database covers companies in different 30 industries in addition to a variety of economic organizations.

As of March 2014, more than 2.2 million entries from some 1,400 volumes of shashi from nearly 760 companies have been processed. Approximately two thirds of that data are now available and searchable through the SSD. Users can search the SSD in five fields: basic bibliographic information and notes, tables of contents, indexes, titles of source materials, and chronological tables. Unfortunately, the main text of the shashi cannot be included due to copyright laws. Since the shashi it covers are in Japanese, the SSD is only available in Japanese.

There are four main search windows: “ワード検索” for keyword searches of bibliographic information, tables of contents, indexes, chronological tables, and titles of source materials; “会社名検索” for searching shashi by company name; “年表項目を検索” for searches of the chronological tables; and “索引語を検索” for searches of terms from the indexes. Shashi included in the database are listed in alphabetical and other orders, including by industry. Personal names are also listed in alphabetical order.

Search Examples

Searching the chronological tables may be easy and fun even for those who are untrained in economic history. Because search results give entries from chronological tables, users can gain an understanding of an event or company without looking at the original shashi. For example, a search with the term “女性” (women), will result in 587 hits. The earliest entry is from 1887, an entry in the Mitsukoshi Department Store’s shashi noting that two French female dressmakers came to Japan in September. Other early entries include mention of a service examination for female telephone operators by the Yokohama Switchboard Station of Nihon Denshin Denwa Company in October 1892 and Hani Motoko joining Hochi Shinbunsha as the first female journalist in December 1898. Almost half of the hits date from the period between 1981 and 2000, as demonstrated by the bar graph at the top of the hit list. Clicking the bar for a certain period leads to a list of hits for this period with a circle graph showing frequency by industry. For example, the graph for the period of 1981-2000, demonstrates that more than half of the entries fall into the service, insurance, and transportation industries. These include a number of “first females” such as the first female bus drivers, appearing in the shashi of Keihin Kyuko and Keio Dentetsu in 1991, and that of the Seibu Bus Group in 1992.

Searching the chronological tables with the word “制服” (uniform) gives 172 hits. The number of references to uniforms gradually increases from the 1860s to the 2000s. Earlier entries refer to the adoption of Western uniforms. For example, the shashi of Keisei Dentetsu says that:

In Meiji 5 (1872), the uniform of railway servicemen was designed in the Western style. Before then they had had swallow-tailed coats and silk hats or eboshi [a type of headgear worn by court nobles] and hitatare [ceremonial court robes], with many wearing swords as well.

In April 1886 the Imperial University laid down a rule for uniforms, prescribing high-collar suits and Western-style square hats. Uniforms spread gradually to sailors, telegraph employees, students, and shop girls.

Searching the chronological tables with the word “簿記” (bookkeeping) gives 48 hits. Examples include mention of the Ministry of Finance introducing Western-style bookkeeping in 1875, two years after the Dai-Ichi Bank. Both Mitsui and Mitsubishi concentrated their efforts in the late 1870s on bookkeeping training and department stores such as Isetan and Daimaru finally changed their accounting system to Western-style bookkeeping in 1915.

It is also possible to search for a particular date in the chronological tables. For example, July 30, 1914, gives 7 hits including the establishment of Hokuetsu Itagami (Cardboard) Company; a raise by the Bank of England of bill discount rates from 3% to 4% (followed by further raises to 8% on July 31 and 10% on August 1); and the suspension of the conversion of paper currency by Switzerland (followed by Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, and France in early August).

Searching by keyword gives more sophisticated results as, instead of being limited to chronological tables, it searches across five fields as mentioned above. Search results consist of individual shashi and results are shown by field. For example, a search with the term “赤字” (deficits) gives 0 hits in basic information, 72 in tables of contents, 15 in indexes, 251 in chronological tables, and 0 in titles of source materials. At the top of the result page of each field is a circle graph showing the ratio of hits by industry. The graphs for deficits suggest that while banks have the highest number of hits across the board, mention of the term is evident in shashi from a wide range of other industries. Being able to look at search results by field offers additional information as the meaning of a term can depend on where it is used. For example, the fact that a term is used in a table of contents would seem to indicate that the incident/phenomena expressed by the term is important to the history of the company. Mention in

the chronological tables, on the other hand, may refer to incidents in society at large in addition to those specific to the company itself.

Selecting the name “Asano Soichiro” from the alphabetical personal name list gives a large number of results; 12 hits in basic information, 18 in tables of contents, 24 in indexes, 47 in chronological tables, and 13 in titles of source materials. The industry ratio shown in the circle graphs vary from field to field. The graph from the basic information field shows the industries in which Asano was closely related as a manager, while the tables of contents field shows where Asano was important in terms of company history. One hit I personally found surprising was the mention of Asano as a loan recipient in the table of contents of the shashi of a bank, thus expressing the importance of this investment to the bank in question.

Conclusion: The Serendipity of Search Results

The SSD is a unique type of database, making use of shashi as a source of information on economic history. Although the search system may look unfamiliar at first glance, the database contains rich information on Japanese society and related topics in a form that we hope proves to be user-friendly. The examples described above give just a miniscule glimpse of the database and the information, both anticipated and not, that can be gained from it.

Just like other databases, the SSD has issues that have not yet been solved. One major issue is that of old and new kanji. In principle, old-style kanji have been replaced by new kanji except for when there is no new equivalent for an old kanji, in which case the old kanji has been used as is. For example, since 洲 is not simply the old style version of 州, entries in the database use the character that appears in the shashi. Consequently, 満洲 (Manchuria, as written in the style used before the war), and 満州 (Manchuria, as written after the post-war kanji revisions) produce different search results. Most of the hits for 満洲 come from shashi published before 1945.

The SSD is still a work in progress. We plan to add more data in early 2015 and welcome your thoughts on and experiences of using this database.

Editors note: Comments sent to shashi@mail.pitt.edu will be forwarded to the author.



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the University Library System, University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program and is cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press.